

Public Participation Listening Session Results - 2008

In December 2007 and the Spring of 2008, EQC held three (3) listening sessions to receive input on our public participation process. We received over 5,000 comments from the various stakeholders who attended. We narrowed down the information into the following priorities. The overall themes we heard were:

- 1) Earlier notification
- 2) Better communication with the public and among ourselves
- 3) More education
- 4) More consistency
- 5) Foresight

The following 12 priorities have been identified:

1. Public Notification Process
 - Early notification to allow people to get involved (82 comments received)
 - Let the public know as soon as we know about a potential site/permit
 - Notifying early allows people to get prepared - do more research – have more time to get informed
 - Notify before a draft permit is prepared
 - Notify those affected within a certain radius of proposed site
 - Public notices should be consistent between Bureaus
 - Notify public before site clean-up
 - Notify people early in the rule-making process
2. Effective Public Noticing
 - Better visibility of notifications
 - Use plain language
 - Require industry to notify public
 - Add advertising/noticing fee to application
 - Be specific on what is expected/wanted from public when notifying
 - i. Examples: what is expected from public, purpose of meeting, whether we will receive comments
3. Educate on our Roles
 - Educate the “Public” on what our role is
 - i. Clarify what our authority is
 - Educate industry on what our role is vs. theirs
 - Educate the public on how they can get involved
 - Educate the public on the Public Participation process
 - i. When
 - ii. How
 - DHEC staff should advocate more for the public, not industry

- Have empathy/sincerity
 - i. Respect
 - ii. Listen
 - iii. Stay true to word, commitments
4. Educate Public
- On our processes
 - Appeal process
 - Terminology
 - How to conserve resources
 - Research
 - Current hot topics in area
 - On public notice/topics
 - On who to contact within DHEC
5. Health Issues
- Should be considered in decision making
 - More research provided
 - Should be more direct
 - Educate public on health issues
 - Provide public notice when there is a health risk
 - i. Major impact should require an immediate notification
6. Enforcement
- DHEC should provide more attention to
 - i. More consistency across the EQC
 - ii. Suggested items that should get more attention are: stormwater and local jurisdictions
 - Not executing existing authority
 - i. Stay firm
 - ii. Stick to rules
 - Fix problem rather than fining
 - Penalties should go toward fixing problem
7. More tighter rules than Federal rules
- Dialogue on which regulations should be made tighter
 - i. Do this before we are mandated by Feds
 - More stringent authority for Agency
 - More consistency
8. Create Partnerships
- DHEC and community
 - DHEC and other agencies
 - DHEC and local governments

- DHEC and industry
 - Industry and community
9. Processes/Policies
- Should be consistent
 - Should be transparent
 - Involve all stakeholders in development
 - Should be based on science
 - Should be less structured/rigid
 - Educate on legislative regulation development process
10. Inform the Public
- Every 6 months hold local stakeholder meeting/open house
 - More local meetings
 - i. Especially with more rural, minority communities
 - Set location for regional information
 - Have more dialogue with stakeholders
 - Focus groups/CAPS/Citizen Advisory Groups
11. Tell Public and Staff Who to Contact
- Train receptionist on how to funnel calls/who to call
 - Better organizational charts
 - List by job, title, program, region
 - Update regularly
 - Familiar person to stay with project
 - Build database
 - Make region staff more accessible
12. How to Better Contact our Stakeholders?
- Use local environmental groups to get word out
 - Neighborhood associations
 - Identify and use public contact person
 - Face-to-face meetings
 - i. Workshops
 - ii. Forums
 - iii. Word of mouth – talk to people
 - iv. More meetings with grassroots
 - Newspaper
 - i. Dedicated spot each week
 - ii. More visible section
 - Churches
 - Local newspapers – PSAs
 - Billboards
 - SCETV
 - Radio – PSAs

- Newsletters
 - i. Make them colorful
 - ii. E-newsletter
- Parks/Recreational areas
- Corner stores
- Use More modern technology
 - i. More outlets to get word out
 - ii. E-mail – list serves (weekly)
 - iii. Websites

There were six (6) items that ranked as a priority but were viewed as needing to be addressed by management within DHEC rather than those on the committee who are responsible for addressing the public participation initiative. They have been passed on to EQC management; they have begun to address some of these. The task force will remain mindful of these as we conduct our public participation work.

1. Plain Language
2. Quality of Life (QOL) Issues
 - Perception that we can address QOL issues
 - DHEC should start addressing QOL issues
 - Should be local solutions to local issues
 - Inform public of QOL issues
3. Environment (Stakeholder's Perception)
 - DHEC should take lead on environmental issues (be more definitive)
 - DHEC appears more responsible to industry than environment
 - DHEC should consider more conservation options
4. Foresight/Big Picture
 - Identify potential impacts based on knowledge/past history
 - Look not only at the site, but the surrounding sites as a whole
 - Lack of bad-boy legislation drives permit process
 - From state to state
 - From location to location within State
5. Improvements to FOI Process
6. Improvements to DHEC's Website

The two (2) other issues that the public participation work groups will address are “meeting/hearings” and “fact sheets”.